



# NEWS

**Federal Communications Commission**  
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**Washington, D. C. 20554**

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## WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS ESSENTIAL TO BRIDGING "COMMUNICATIONS GAP" FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Washington, D.C. – Wireless industry representatives and consumers with physical and developmental disabilities met yesterday at the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association in Washington, D.C. to further a dialogue about the integral role of wireless communications services. The meeting brought together key parties to focus on common goals and increased understanding among the groups. The event was moderated by FCC Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy and organized through the Commission's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau.

During the conference, the parties agreed that (1) wireless communications services present an important opportunity to close the communications divide that affects many people with disabilities, (2) wireless providers, equipment manufactures, and consumers agree that open communication among the groups advances their mutual interests, and (3) continued private dialog best advances the public interest.

Participants included individuals from various disabilities services groups such as the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University, United Cerebral Palsy Associations, and the Philadelphia Independent Living Center. Researchers from the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Communication Enhancement at Duke University Medical Center, and from the Communications Aids Manufacturers Association (CAMA) participated as well.

In addition to CTIA, wireless carriers represented included AT&T Wireless, Cingular Wireless, Nextel, Sprint PCS, Verizon Wireless, and VoiceStream. Wireless manufacturers Ericsson, Sony-Ericsson, Motorola, and Nokia also participated. FCC attendees included: Commissioner Abernathy, Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Chief K. Dane Snowden, Wireless Bureau Deputy Chief Jim Schlichting, as well as other FCC personnel.

More than 2.7 million Americans have a significant speech disability that requires assistance from either a person or a communications device. A speech disability may result from cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, mental disabilities, and other medical conditions.

Participants with speech and developmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and mental retardation, discussed why they value wireless telephony. For example, some said the added security of a wireless phone is a vital link for emergency assistance in light of the limited mobility of these consumers. Similarly, wireless technology facilitates the difficult coordination process that is often necessary to provide transportation services and other opportunities for those with physical disabilities. "I got a cell

phone, because I feel safer when I'm rolling," explained wheelchair-user Paul Pecunas. "When my bus doesn't show up, I call my friend, and she helps me."

"This is the first time that I know of that people with significant communications disabilities will be sitting at the same table with cellular telephone manufacturers, with wireless service providers, with research developers, and with communication aid manufacturers," said Dr. Diane Nelson Bryen, professor and executive director of the Institute on Disabilities, Pennsylvania's University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities at Temple University. "With the key stakeholders at the same table, there is no doubt in my mind that effective use of cellular telephones will become a reality for the millions of individuals with significant communications disabilities."

The consumers with speech and developmental disabilities also discussed some possible areas for additional work with the wireless telephony industry. Some identified interoperability issues associated with electronic speech equipment, often referred to as augmentative communications devices (ACDs), and wireless phones. Access to customer care, the usability of features (such as hands-free dialing), and the availability of donated handsets for use by economically disadvantaged people with disabilities for use during emergencies were also on the agenda.

In addressing these issues, industry representatives committed to continuing discussions and highlighted existing programs that address some of these concerns. For example, one carrier has created a National Disability Customer Care Center and Wireless Access Task Force to monitor concerns and develop constructive solutions.

"The wireless industry has a longstanding commitment to providing accessibility to our products and services for people with disabilities," said Tom Wheeler, President and CEO of CTIA. "We applaud Commissioner Abernathy's efforts to bring together people with physical and mental disabilities and the wireless industry to constructively address our many issues of mutual interest."

Commissioner Abernathy stressed the important role that government can play as a "convenor" and to encourage private parties to listen and learn from one another. "Whenever possible, I prefer to see consumers and providers determine the best way to form and maintain a healthy relationship. These parties can often respond to each other's needs more effectively than government. Wireless communications are transforming American life, and those with physical and developmental disabilities must be a part of that transformation. CTIA and the companies here are demonstrating, in a very tangible way, their commitment to that goal."

Snowden said, "This event is typical of the cooperative efforts that the FCC has undertaken to help consumers nationwide. We are establishing partnerships with industry, other governmental entities and, of course, consumers, to reach our common goal - excellent consumer service. This is a goal that can be reached only through cooperation and coordination with all these partners."

If you would like to reach others who attended the dialogue session, please call Rosemary Kimball (listed above) for further contact information.